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### NEWS RELEASE

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hazel Tyliniski, [hazel.tyliniski@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:hazel.tyliniski@oregonlegislature.gov)

Connor Radnovich, [connor.radnovich@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:connor.radnovich@oregonlegislature.gov)

### **Over \$90 Million Slated to Address Public Defense Crisis**

*A strong and accountable public defense system is an essential part of making Oregon communities safer.*

**SALEM, Ore.** - Today, Oregon legislative leaders announced the Legislature's response to our state's public defender shortage. The package of policies and more than \$90 million in investments will protect Oregonians' right to representation, reduce caseloads, and bolster the public defender workforce. This framework is part of the Legislature's commitment to investing in a [safer Oregon](#).

“We are in a public defense crisis,” said [Representative Paul Evans](#) (D-Monmouth), Co-Chair of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety. “The work we did this session will help us meet this urgent need through stabilization, targeted investments and necessary structural reforms, allowing for a more effective and reliable public defense system moving forward.”

The [Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety](#) advanced [Senate Bill 337](#) and related agency budgets on Tuesday, June 6. It now heads to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

The 2023-2025 public defenders budget framework makes investments to stabilize the provider base and agency operations and address the unrepresented crisis. These investments are part of the [Public Safety and Accountability Budget framework](#) legislators highlighted key pieces of last week. **A critical part of keeping Oregon communities safe is ensuring an accountable, transparent, and efficient Public Defense arm of our legal system.**

“This is a multifaceted problem. In order to move forward we need to address the operational stability of our public defense agency, solve our unrepresented crisis and make structural changes to ensure this never happens again,” said [Senator Janeen Sollman](#) (D-Hillsboro). “We owe it to Oregonians to have a public defense system that protects everyone’s rights and ensures comprehensive public safety.”

This framework will **stabilize Oregon’s public defense system by:**

- **Investing over \$90 million** in the Oregon Public Defense Commission (formerly the Public Defense Services Commission) and other resources and services supporting work to end the unrepresented crisis.
- **Addressing the Immediate Crisis.** Too many Oregonians are currently waiting at home or in jail for an attorney. This legislation would:
  - Require the presiding judge of each unique judicial district to prepare a coordinated public safety unrepresented defendant crisis **plan to get people representation now.**
  - **Create strike response teams** to strategically allocate public defenders into court systems with the most severe need from regional hubs across the state.
  - Invest in workforce **recruitment and retention** by increasing funding for training, compensation, and contracting.
- **Modernizing Oregon’s public defense system through meaningful, systemic reform.** Our legal system should be sustainable, dependable, and predictable. This package:
  - Ensures oversight and accountability by moving the Oregon Public Defense Commission to the executive branch.
  - Increases data collection and reporting requirements.

The Legislature will continue to monitor and evaluate the resource needs across the public safety system and respond accordingly.

“The efforts of the [Three Branch Workgroup](#) that informed this bill will have long-term benefits for Oregon’s criminal justice system,” said [Representative Jason Kropf](#) (D-Bend), Chair of the

House Judiciary Committee and a former Public Defender and Deputy District Attorney. “When people are unrepresented, it erodes confidence in our court system and cases cannot be addressed and resolved in a timely manner. When cases are not resolved in a timely manner, it's not good for people who are accused of crimes, for crime victims, or for public safety.”

Prioritizing public safety and making sure state government delivers on its promises to Oregonians have been key priorities for legislative leaders this session. These reforms and investments in the state's public defense system are a critical component of that work.

Also included in the Legislature's [Public Safety and Accountability Budget framework](#) are robust investments in the Department of Justice, the Oregon Judicial Department, the Oregon State Police, and fully resourcing the Oregon Department of Emergency Management at an unprecedented \$1.3 billion.

More details on these investments will be made available as committees discuss these proposals and productive conversations between members, stakeholders, and constituents continue.

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